

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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SenatorBenCardin



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Dear Fellow Marylanders:

If you've tried catching a train recently in Montgomery County, Prince George's County or elsewhere in the Washington area, it's been a rough couple of weeks. Maybe this situation is familiar to you: you hustle from your bus stop or MARC train into the Metro station hoping you haven't just missed the train. The train comes. It has only six cars, and it's a bit more crowded than what you've been used to lately. But it sure beats getting stuck on the platform for another 30 minutes or more, worrying if you will make it to your job on time and if your pay - or your job - will be cut because you are behind schedule again.

That's the situation riders have faced for the past two weeks in the DC area after an [Oct. 12 derailment in Arlington, Va.](#) led to 60 percent of the system's rail cars being pulled from service for safety reasons. Thankfully, no one was seriously hurt when the derailment happened. For the 187 passengers evacuated that day, it wasn't exactly a fun ride either. Jennifer Homendy, Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), said [the incident could have been catastrophic](#).

It's important that the NTSB is investigating the Metro derailment, because we need to understand how it happened and how to prevent it from happening again. The NTSB investigation should include why the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) failed to implement a course of action sufficient to prevent the derailment back when [problems with its newest rail cars first became known](#). I have been a huge proponent of greater public transit throughout Maryland and I have urged WMATA to cooperate fully with the NTSB and the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission, the independent safety oversight group that is also participating in the [investigation](#). Transit has to be convenient and accessible, but safety must be paramount.

Of course, the investigation will take time. In the meantime, passengers are suffering from reduced service. Sadly, I am sure that transit riders in Baltimore can relate to this suffering. They know it's been a bumpy road out there for years, even without a derailment under investigation. They know that Baltimore's transit system isn't what

it should be — that the city’s rail transit network is not as comprehensive as it could be and that buses haven’t been running as frequently or as reliably as they should. Our city residents and workers, many of whom do critical jobs that cannot be done from home, deserve reliable transit that truly supports them in their daily efforts to care for jobs, homes, and families.

Right now, it’s a struggle. It shouldn’t be this way. Metrorail service was widely viewed as improving before the pandemic, but I am disappointed that the agency clearly has not been more on top of its game on safety. That needs to change — immediately. The Hogan administration turned its back on transit in Baltimore when it [cancelled a new Red Line in 2015](#). That project would have been nearing completion today if not for that regrettable, misguided decision.

Improvements in transit service take serious investment and years of planning. We have to do better for our cities and our workers who keep them going. We need to turn the page and begin a new chapter for public transportation.

I am fighting for that new beginning. And now, there are reasons for optimism — and even celebration. Last week, I had the pleasure of participating in a groundbreaking ceremony for a major [redevelopment of Baltimore’s historic Pennsylvania Station](#), a beloved landmark and a gateway to our city and state. The Penn Station redevelopment project promises to honor the station’s history and character, while delivering a dramatically improved and expanded space for welcoming passengers and visitors.

To complement the investments that Amtrak is making in the new station, I am using the recently reintroduced process of “congressionally directed spending,” often referred to as “earmarks,” to call for \$5 million in additional support this year. This funding will advance the Maryland Department of Transportation’s work to enhance multi-modal infrastructure at the station—in short, making the station safer and more user-friendly for people making connections between trains, buses, bikes, and cars.

As with all important transportation projects, a new and improved Penn Station will take time and resources. But the groundbreaking was an uplifting event—it reminded me of what is on the horizon, what is possible, and what work we can do together. That is how I am feeling about the potential, upcoming passage in Congress of an historic investment in our nation’s infrastructure and our people.

So yes, not all the news is bad and there are things to celebrate. For those of you out there making your way on trains and buses every day, I know you’re hurting. And I know change is frustratingly slow.

But I will not give up the fight for better public transportation. [I’ve secured language in the bipartisan infrastructure bill](#) to help restore a federal partnership on the Baltimore Red Line when the state’s leadership signals it’s willing to move forward.

And I've joined several of my colleagues in calling for additional funding for public transit in the Build Back Better budget package.

I am excited about enacting President Biden's Build Back Better agenda into law. When we do, I know that better days are ahead for Maryland transit riders throughout our state.

Please stay safe,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The signature is stylized with a large, cursive "B" and a smaller "en" following it.

Ben Cardin